

1 **ABSTRACT**

2 A parcel management system is provided to reliably transfer parcels from
3 one computer to another and track the parcels as they are transferred. The parcel
4 management system is implemented in a distributed electronic billing system in
5 which billers submit billing data to a service center and the service center
6 generates billing statements from the billing data and electronically distributes the
7 billing statements to consumers on behalf of the biller. The electronic billing
8 system includes a biller integration system resident at each of the billers. The
9 biller integration system is a set of software tools that integrate with the biller's
10 existing billing and accounting systems. The biller integration system sends the
11 billing data and a statement template to the billing service center, where they are
12 stored. The service center generates customized billing statements by inserting the
13 data into the template and distributing the billing statements electronically to
14 consumers. The biller integration system and service center are each equipped
15 with a gateway to facilitate the exchange of the statement template, the billing
16 data, resources, and rules. Each gateway has a parcel manager to reliably transfer
17 parcels and track the parcels as they go from one computer at the biller to another
18 computer at the service center. Through this parcel handling and monitoring
19 system, the biller integration system keeps the biller informed as to the location
20 and status of the statement templates, the billing data, any forthcoming payments,
21 and so forth.